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ABSTRACT

This report explores the partnerships between local development organizations and Redd Barna (RB), a Norwegian development organization engaged in child-centered development work in Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Chapter 1 of the report introduces the concept of partnership as viewed from donor and recipient perspectives, describes the methodology, and discusses the Asian backdrop. Chapter 2, "Exploring Partnership," explores dimensions of partnerships in general, including their formality, participants' power, symbolic nature, and duration; and considers partnerships in sports, business, patron/client relationships, social contracts, and development. Chapter 3, "Development Partnerships," focuses on RB-Asian development partnerships, including the parties involved, the importance of mutual benefits, and features of effective partnerships related to orientation, resource profiles, partnership interface, and the interaction of these three components to form the partnership model. Shifts from donor/client to partnership relationships are discussed. Chapter 4, "Making Development Partnerships Work," deals with practical implications of partnership building, including commitment to partnership, shared vision, institutional and human resource capacity, the issue of equality, and partnership maintenance. Program development is discussed, with a focus on program features, dissemination and replication of pilot programs, sustainability, networking opportunities, and partner selection. Chapter 5, "Building Partnerships for Children in Asia," deals with the debate on whether children should be direct beneficiaries of development projects, considers ways to measure impact on children, and points out the importance of strengthening child advocacy. Chapter 6, "The Cultural Context of Partnership," considers cultural differences and how they affect the ways partnerships are forged and maintained. Contains 27 references. (KB)

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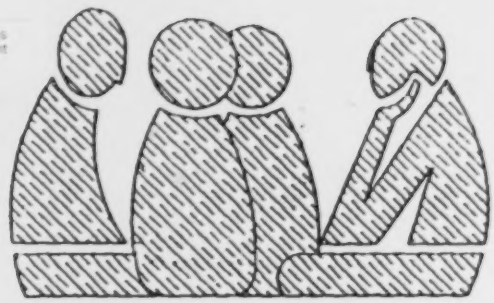

Asian Dialogue No. 5

PARTNERSHIP: A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN

Learning from Redd Barna's Experience in Asia

Rekha Wazir
Nico van Oudenhoven
in
Partnership with
Redd Barna Staff in Asia

PS 026035

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Editor
Bengt Ageros

REDD BARNA - Asia

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REDD BARNA
P. O. Box 6200, Etterstad
0602 OSLO 6, Norway
Phone: (47) 22 08 16 00
Fax: (47) 22 08 17 40

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About REDD BARNA - Asian Dialogues

The intentions with the REDD BARNA - Asian Dialogues are to create opportunities for people to learn from each other. To see the realities through other persons' eyes, and learn something new. To foster tolerance of differences in opinions, values, cultures, social and religious beliefs.

This volume deals with the often used concept of partnership; partnerships between local development organizations or entities and an international development organization.

There are many definitions of partnership, but we often fail to clarify to each other what our definitions are. The relationship between two organizations from different cultures is sometimes complicated even though we have similar visions and goals. Both partners cary their own concept, their own history and their own expectations with them when they establish and confirm a partnership. That should be accepted, but also remembered and not overlooked or minimized in importance to avoid unnecessary frustrations and misunderstandings.

The Asian Dialogues is attempting to be one of many tools to assist prospective partners in understanding how complex the partnership issue is and hopefully make them better accept each other through an honest and frank dialogue.

Foreword

Just a few decades ago a handshake sealed a partnership. Today legal documents are drawn up and scrutinized. In a business partnership today one quickly learns that it is not the contract itself with is important, - but the "fine print" attached to it.

In some societies gifts are exchanged as confirmation and symbols of a partnership. The gift is as good as any document on print. Trust and honor are the key factors.

How does one then deal with partnership? What constitutes a given partnership? Why is it that we go to such length to sign agreements of partnerships. Is it because that is what auditors require? Is it, when it comes to an agreement between a local NGO and an international NGO, that the culture is to be blamed? Is it that we do not know how to 'read trust' in a partner, develop trust in a bi- or multi-cultural society?

We know that partnerships, *per se*, exist in all societies. Between husband and wife, family and community, between nations, between soccer players, between an airline and its passengers, - the examples never seem to end. Are, for instance, partnerships between development agencies different than those between commercial ones? Different dimensions or based on different ethics?

The two writers, Rekha Wazir and Nico van Oudenhoven have compiled a variety of issues and dimensions on partnership, in partnership with the Asia Redd Barna staff and together with organizations and persons with whom Redd Barna has partnership contracts or see as partners.

The intention with this volume was to gather the experience Redd Barna has gained over the year, and we are very pleased that Rekha and Nico were willing to take on this task and finish it so well. Surely, it was not an easy assignment.

We would like to share their - our findings with others, individuals and organizations who also struggle to come to terms with the concept of partnership. We hope this volume will provoke some discussions and perhaps provide some clarity on the many definitions of partnership.

Bengt Ageros
Editor, Redd Barna, Vientiane, Lao PDR
May, 1997

Acknowledgements

What we appreciated most about our visits to Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand were our encounters with the countless children, parents, community leaders, project staff, and representatives of local and international NGOs and governments. These people shared with us their concerns and emotions about children and families. This group is at the centre of any meaningful debate on partnership and we would like to thank all those whom we met for their openness and trust and also for their help and encouragement. We hope that the ideas presented here on partnership may prove to be of some use to them.

The Redd Barna Resident Representatives, Bjrn Hagen in Sri Lanka, Sigmund Karlstrm in Cambodia, Jon Kristian Johnsen in Nepal and their colleagues made us feel at home, not only in these countries but also in their offices. They also provided us with a lot of food for thought. It was also a pleasure for us to meet people from Redd Barna Headquarters and to share our ideas with them. Talking about partners and partnership: we have come to see Redd Barna as a valued partner of ICDI!

We have always looked at the relationship between international donors and local recipient organizations as crucial to development. It was Dr. Bengt Ageros, Redd Barna Regional Director for Asia, who really challenged our ideas, and encouraged us to develop them further. We thoroughly enjoyed his intellectual and social companionship and are grateful for his support. His new assignment has taken him to Laos. It is a nice feeling for us to have a highly-respected partner there as well!

Rekha Wazir
Nico van Oudenhoven
International Child Development Initiatives
Leiden, February 1997

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terms of Reference

This paper seeks to document Redd Barna's (RB) experience with partnership in the Asian region and to describe this in an Asian and development context. For RB, the region is currently made up of Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Programme activities are being phased out in Thailand, while Laos is in the process of being opened up. The terms of reference provided to the authors required an exploration of:

(a) the concept of partnership, as viewed from donor and recipient perspectives;
(b) its impact on RB programme management and staff requirements;
(c) its ramifications for programme development and policy for RB and its partners; and
(d) its contribution to sharpening the organization's focus on children.

The reflections presented here are a synthesis of multifarious sources of information and experience. Most notable among them are the discussions held during the visits to Cambodia, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka. During short but intensive missions to these countries, the views and sentiments of a large number of people were sought. These included staff of RB and its partner agencies, local NGOs, government agencies, as well as other international development agencies. These development workers represented a

wide variety and wealth of expertise. Field visits to selected projects complemented these interviews and provided the opportunity for essential reality checks. Encounters with children, parents and community leaders were particularly useful in this respect.

The RB-Asia Seminar on Partnership held in Phnom Penh from 7–9 November, 1996 provided a useful exposure to the organizations' thinking. Staff from RB headquarters, RB country offices in the Asian region and selected partners spent three days deliberating the subject. A paper entitled "Exploring Partnership" was written as a background document which could be used by the participants as a framework within which to structure their own experiences.[1]

Much of the thinking on partnership in RB country offices has been put down in reports and other documents, as has the experience of other international agencies experimenting with this subject. In addition, there is a variety of publications dealing with this topic. These have been digested and, where relevant, brought to bear on the text.

This document builds on the issues that came up during previous reviews of RBs work in Thailand that were conducted in September 1995 and August 1996 and which also touched on the question of partnership.[2] We have also drawn on our own work in development which has seen us, in various incarnations, on either side of the partnership equation. In all our encounters with people, we have tried to query, rather then give answers; to solicit feedback on observations, rather than pass judgment; to open up debates rather than seek conclusions.

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1 See Wazir & Van Oudenhoven (1996).

2 See Van Oudenhoven & Wazir (1996a); and Lauvdal, Van Oudenhoven & Wazir (1996).

This paper consists of six chapters. *Chapter 1* provides introductory remarks on the terms of reference, the methodology used and lays the foundation for the remainder of the paper by describing the Asian backdrop. *Chapter 2* unfolds the concept of partnership in general and explores its features and dimensions. *Chapter 3* deals with one particular type of partnership, i.e., development partnerships. Here again, the features and dimensions of this type of partnership—which form the central concern of this paper—are explored and the perceptions of various players, including from the RB-Asia region, are presented. *Chapter 4* is by far the largest part and deals with the practical implications of partnership building. *Chapter 5* deals with the debate on whether children should be direct beneficiaries of development projects. Finally, *Chapter 6* deals with the difficult subject of cultural differences and how they may affect the way in which partnerships are forged and maintained.

1.2 Partnership Against the Asian Backdrop

Abject poverty in Nepal—in the hills four brothers may share one woman; the legacy of over three million murders in Cambodia—one death in every family; the existence of over 100,000 child prostitutes in Thailand—with Bangkok having the highest number of Mercedes cars per square meter in the world; and criminal waste of vast resources due to civil war in Sri Lanka—estimated at over three million US dollars per day are issues that grip public attention, locally and internationally. But this is only part of the picture. To most Asians, their history and great cultural achievements provide them with an identity and offer spiritual nourishment and guidance.

Is there a unique, specific Asian perspective that colours and determines how Asian NGOs and governmental agencies relate to international donor

and development agencies? This question will be raised throughout the text but it is unlikely that a conclusive answer will emerge. The matter is too complex, too daunting, too personal, and too volatile for proper treatment in this context. However, observations made by staff of RB, local NGOs and GOs and of other INGOs will be presented, analyzed and commented upon. As a result, partnership may be better understood within the Asian context, but the lessons learnt may not prove to be much different from those from Latin America and Africa. The views presented are mainly those expressed by representatives of the four countries studied. As it turned out, these views were very much shaped by the local situation and, probably less so, by being Asian.

Thus, the Cambodians look at partnership coming from a period of mass killings, suppression, and treason that left their country collectively traumatized, deprived of its resources, and with an inadequate social infrastructure. As a result, the Cambodian government is eagerly looking for financial as well as technical support. NGOs are a relatively new phenomena and the few that exist are still very weak and need a fair degree of support for institutional capacity building and training.

Thailand, which has never been colonized, shows all the self-confidence of a nation that is growing economically. Although the poor condition of many of its children is widely recognized, the phrase "the donor should give us the money and let us do the job; we know best" is frequently heard. There is appreciation for the access to international networks that donor agencies provide, but equally, it is accepted that donors would do better to spend their resources in poorer countries like Laos and Cambodia rather than in Thailand.

Sri Lanka, once considered a paradise, now has to contend with the devastating consequences of civil war and ethnic conflict. The legacy of these events is a climate of fear and suspicion. Invariably, the working of INGOs

is influenced by these events as is the perception of local agencies regarding the shift to partnershi-

> "Too many changes. First Redd Barna did emergency supply, then, self-implementation, then community development, then child-in-focus, and now partnership. They can't do this to us. It is like 'those' days again; we are just being bossed around, we feel hurt".
>
> *Community leaders of the village of Trapaing Sala, near the capital Phnom Penh, Cambodia.*

In Nepal, the move to multi-party democracy in 1990, has led to a mushrooming of NGOs and INGOs. Local NGOs are mature and self-confident and are willing to form partnerships on equal terms. However, the majority are still fairly dependent and donor-driven. There is a feeling, even among the NGO community, that they tend to accept the dictates of donors even when they have different perspectives. Not many NGOs are strong and self-reliant enough to negotiate confidently with external donors.

While accepting a global Asian backdrop, it seems more judicious to focus on local conditions in trying to understand how to make partnerships work. These local conditions will differ from country to country and will produce different challenges and opportunities for partnership building. The search for a common denominator becomes less relevant in this scenario. An illustration is provided by the reaction of Cambodians to the move to partnership. They are so severely disturbed by their recent history, that they have become extremely wary of change *per se*, regardless of its nature. This is not a specifically Asian but a Cambodian perspective and it would dictate the manner in which partnership should be introduced, or rather modified, in this context.

It should be noted that the organizational changes RB has gone through have also profoundly influenced the notion of partnership held by RB coun

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try staff and their partners. In its various stages of emergency & relief, general development, community development, child-focused, self-implementing and now partnership organization, Redd Barna has created ways of working, codes of conduct, expectations, as also networks and structures that have coloured these perceptions. Thailand was the first country in Asia to move to partnership and it could serve as a text bookcase; in Nepal also there is considerable experience which could be shared with other field offices; while the process in Sri Lanka has only just begun and deserves documentation. Cambodia is a special case and should be treated as such. Each country will follow its own pace and will have its unique partnership profile.

2 EXPLORING PARTNERSHIP

2.1 What is Partnership?

The word "partnership" is now commonplace in the vocabulary of development. It is encountered in a wide variety of contexts, and is used, and often misused, to describe various kinds of relationships between collaborating parties in the development field. However, there is seldom any precise or exact meaning attached to the usage of this word. Since the term is an accepted part of the literature and practice, and since there is an increasing tendency on the part of international development actors to re-define their relationships as "partnerships", it has become necessary to investigate what is meant by the term.

In real life we can see many different kinds of partnerships. The field of *sports* provides one example. Players enter into a partnership to play a game against other partnerships of players. Their shared intention is to win a game played within a specified set of rules. The application of these rules is monitored and supervised by a neutral third party: the referee. Such a partnership lasts formally for the length of the game, after which it is dissolved. This partnership is set in a competitive context where only one set of partners can win. It is short-term; partners have identical objectives and share the same information pool; the behaviour and performance of each

partner is capable of direct observation and valuation. The referee is required not to mediate between players within one partnership, but between competing partnerships.

A close parallel to this is provided by *business partnerships*. In this type as well, the context remains competitive. The firm (of partners) views its success in relation to its market competitors. The behaviour of partners is governed by a mutuality of interests: making joint profits. Both trust and tight legal rules are required for ensuring fair sharing of costs and benefits. There is always a strong possibility for one of the partners to gain at the expense of the other partner(s). Therefore, regulations are strongly codified in commercial law where the rights and obligations of a partner are clearly set out.

The concept of partnership is also used is the realm of *personal relationships*. These are set within the framework of a household, a family, or a marriage. The marriage partnership is enshrined in the form of marriage vows which bear considerable similarities across cultures! There is a growing critical literature, particularly in the disciplines of feminist and gender studies, which refutes the simplistic idea of this partnership as the ideal co-operative. Instead, it is analyzed as resting on a complex, hierarchical, economic arrangement between the partners. Intra-household relations are held to reflect the same structural conflicts that denote society in general. Such critiques have led to a redefinition of the marriage relationship. They also question marriage as the ideal form of personal partnership.

The term partnership could also apply to an arrangement between parties which stand in structural opposition to one another. This is illustrated by the case of *patron/client* relationships. These are intrinsically hierarchical in character. Take the example of landowner-tenant ties. It has been argued

that the flow of advantages is not all in the direction of the landowner. In return for labour provided at exploitative rates, the tenant obtains some protection and insurance from the landlord in seasons when harvests are bad. There is an element of reciprocity in what is essentially an unequal relationship.

Another example is provided by the term "*social contract*". This is often used in the political domain to refer to a compact between the representatives of capital and labour. Workers could agree not to take industrial action in exchange for assurances from employers that their wages would rise in step with productivity increases.

The term partnership is frequently used in the global context as well. In the early decades of Post-War development, the notion of "*partners in development*" was introduced by the North to describe the economic relationship between the rich donor and the poor aid-recipient countries. The subsequent critique of "unequal partners" exposed the structural disagreements and inequalities that were being glossed over by the usage of this term. The rhetorical use of the term partnership is thus not new to the language of development and invariably leads to cynicism. Some NGOs point out that while the talk about partnership increases, the demands put on them by donors get tougher all the time. The rules and regulations of some INGOs are said to be so voluminous that one could actually *sit* on the accumulated manuals![3]

---

3 Although Redd Barna strikes a good figure compared to other international donors, its new PAR (Planning, Accounting, Reporting) system is regarded with suspicion by some local NGOs who feel they are being put under unnecessary scrutiny.

Features of constructive/non-constructive partnerships

Constructive	*Non-constructive*
shared vision	no vision
financial and other support	no planning
voluntarism	no contract
trust	fixed ideas
no self-promotion	topdown management
consultative management	changing personnel
advocacy	insensitivity to culture
non formal	lacking consultation
courage	no underlying partnership concept
self-reliance	
advocacy	
shared vision	

RB-Asia Seminar on Partnership, 7–9 November 1996, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

2.2 Features of Partnerships

From the above descriptions we can extract some features or elements which are common to partnerships in general.

- a partnership is a relationship between two or more *parties* who are not necessarily of equal status. They may be drawn from different social and cultural backgrounds;

- they arise because of the recognition that joint action could achieve outcomes for each party that would not have been possible through independent action;
- the parties could have identical or shared visions and *objectives*. This is not a necessary condition since the parties could also collaborate with each other for the fulfilment of their own, separate, objectives. In this case identical interests are replaced by compatible interests;
- the partners could get together if they have:
  (a) identical characteristics and objectives,
  (b) complementary characteristics and objectives—the differences between them then become a source of mutual benefits, or when there is
  (c) an advantage to be gained by strength of numbers as in networks which address joint problems or objectives;
- the realisation of objectives requires the formulation and implementation of a joint *strategy*.

Thus, the characteristics of the partners, the nature of their objectives and of the strategies employed by them form the three key elements of all partnerships. The question then is: when is a partnership "successful"? And following from this: what are the ingredients of a successful partnership?

2.3 Partnership: Some Dimensions

It is useful to first identify some of the major dimensions along which partnerships can be understood.

- formal/informal
- vertical/horizontal
- symbolic/concrete

- static/dynamic
- one-to-one/multiple
- one-off/longer-term

Formal/informal partnerships

In a formal partnership the parties come together in a contractual arrangement for reaching a shared objective. The objectives are well defined; the terms of engagement and mutual expectations are clear; the costs, benefits and risks are shared or apportioned. The behaviour of each partner is monitored by a contract and by an external code of practice—the law. This kind of arrangement is typical of the commercial, business culture, although it is not the only one to be found in this sector.

Informal partnerships, on the other hand, are governed by trust and are based on shared norms, shared culture and shared identity. They include arrangements between family, kin, caste, community, tribe and networks. The code of conduct is implicit and involves a system of internal rewards and penalties. The relationship between the partners is more holistic than in a formal arrangement and the costs of monitoring are fewer. Commercial relationships can also be guided by informal criteria: the East Asian economic miracle is attributed, in part, to the use of familial networks.

Vertical/horizontal partnerships

Horizontal, or lateral, partnerships are typically formed between institutions or individuals who have different interests and capacities but are relatively equal in terms of power or position. For example, an initiative that brings together local government and business or two or more international NGOs around an issue of common interest.

In a vertical partnership the players hold positions of unequal power or responsibilities. Such a relationship may exist between a grass-roots organization and a government agency. Both horizontal and vertical partnerships can be used to achieve shared objectives that none of the partners could have handled alone.

Symbolic/concrete partnerships

In some partnerships individuals represent themselves or a well-defined group or institution. In a business relationship individuals may represents their personal interests; the staff of an NGO can speak on behalf of their organization and are expected to safeguard its interests. Such relationships are tangible and the interests that individuals represent in these partnerships are concrete.

Other partnerships are more symbolic. It has become common practice for development agencies to invite representatives of target groups to join in their discussions. These may be children, youth, women or members of minority groups. The individuals involved are not expected to represent their personal interests but of children, youth, women and minorities in general. Partnerships between them and concrete organizations are largely notional and maintained for political and symbolic reasons.

Static/dynamic partnerships

A partnership can be governed by a rigid code of behaviour which does not allow for changes or interpretations. Such static partnerships can be found when a grant is given under strict conditions and for a clearly laid-down purpose.

A dynamic partnership, on the other hand, allows for adjustments in means and objectives to reflect changing circumstances, if this is to the mutual

benefit of both parties concerned. Such relations could also be governed by a legal framework but one which allows for flexibility. Both partnerships are quite common in development work.

One-to-one/multiple partnerships

Partnerships can be made on a one-to-one basis or simultaneously with a number of groups. When more partners are involved, a "spider web" or " matrix' model can be distinguished. In the first, one party positions itself in the centre and dominates the exchange as in the case of an international donor agency which has relations with a number of local NGOs. In the second, decision-making is the result of joint action as in the case of a network of like-minded organizations.

One-off/longer-term partnerships

Organizations or individuals may join forces for one occasion to achieve a shared objective. This type of partnership ends after the mission has been completed but may be resumed when needed. Others stretch out over longer periods of time. The activities they jointly undertake are usually connect ed. Partnerships may also lie dormant for a while and be resuscitated when the need arises.

The categories presented above are not mutually exclusive—in principle, a partnership could cover several dimensions. This list is also not intended to be exhaustive. At the RB-Asia Seminar on Partnership, participants extended it to include the dimensions of: profit/non-profit, funding/non-funding, implementor/facilitator and imposed/voluntary.

CARE Sri Lanka orders its partners along two basic dimensions: equivalent versus inequivalent, and hands-on versus hands-off.[4] All these dimensions can come into play at any given moment, and partnerships can be rated in different ways along the same dimension. Thus extremely formal contracts can easily coexist alongside a dynamic, short-term arrangement. This goes to show that an understanding of partnership cannot really be capsulated by a single definition, but is rather created by the partners themselves.

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[4] See: Partnership in CARE Sri Lanka Projects. 21 January 1997, CARE Sri Lanka, Colombo.

3 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The concept of partnership has been in vogue in international development practice for over twenty years. It stems from the belief that development is a complex process which involves more than merely transferring skills and resources and the development effort can succeed only when it is based on mutual respect for each others' autonomy and experience. These views involved a major ideological shift in the thinking of development agencies and found reflection in a new terminology whereby words such as paternalism, relief, service delivery, dependency, donor-driven, single project focus and unsustainable development were replaced by partnership, participation, cooperation, mutual training and education, self reliance, community direct ed, and sustainable development.[5]

This thinking has been encouraged by the progressive shift in the orientation of international organizations from relief and welfare work to sustainable community development and more recently to people's movements. A parallel transition is noticeable in the way donor agencies perceive themselves—the position of banker or financial gate-keeper is no longer accept-

[5] For a detailed description of the paradigm shift, see Campfens (1966).

able and is considered to be paternalistic. Partnership is considered a more appropriate description of their new role as "development" agencies.

Donor agencies have also come to realize that it is more expedient to work with local partners. Whereas the move towards partnership is generally justified in development terms, another argument that is often given is that it has the advantage of being more cost effective.[6] International donors can reduce their field staff or do away with them altogether. As partners, they can also have more impact in fundraising and as international advocates when they have access to local knowledge and experience.[7] For example, staff of CWIN—one of RB's partners in Nepal—have helped RB in its fundraising efforts in Norway.

The parties involved in a development partnership are: governments, international donor agencies, indigenous NGOs, local groups, grass-roots organizations, the community, and the beneficiaries (children, youth, women, small-scale farmers etc.). What brings these diverse units together is their shared common goal of catalyzing "development", defined most broadly in terms of emancipation from various forms of oppression. The alleviation of poverty and the guarantee of fundamental human rights remains at the core of this agenda.

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6 A caveat has to be made here. It is often overlooked that the donor agencies' administrative costs are now shifted to partners but are reported back to headquarters as programme support costs.

7 The beneficiaries of traditional, self-implemented projects may feel differently. They may experience bewilderment, incomprehension or even a sense of betrayal. As the leader of West Prev Veng village in Cambodia, who now has to contend with RB moving to partnership said: "Redd Barna's help is like being given a pig's bladder to cross the river which is then punched in mid-stream".

There are several levels of development partnerships, with each successive layer nested within a larger entity:

- multilateral global partnerships for joint action on common issues and problems such as the environment, child rights, human rights;
- multilateral international partnerships involving a region or a group of countries, i.e., ASEAN, SAARC, NAFTA;
- bilateral arrangements between individual countries involving specific treaties and agreements;
- between international donor agencies and indigenous NGOs;
- within the south: between the NGO community and between NGOs and grass roots, community, and people's organizations;
- between these organizations and the ultimate beneficiaries of development, and finally, between the beneficiaries themselves.

Development partnerships do not operate in isolation. There is an interplay between the various levels mentioned above and the partnership is both facilitated and constrained by this interaction. They are influenced by the wishes of their constituents; by the mandate and constraints of their respect ive organizations; by government policy and economic interests; by local politics, interest groups and power balances, and finally by the overarching phenomenon of globalization. The concrete case of the partnership between a Redd Barna country office and a local NGO is taken as an example to illustrate the multiple partners and interests that play a part (see Table 1).

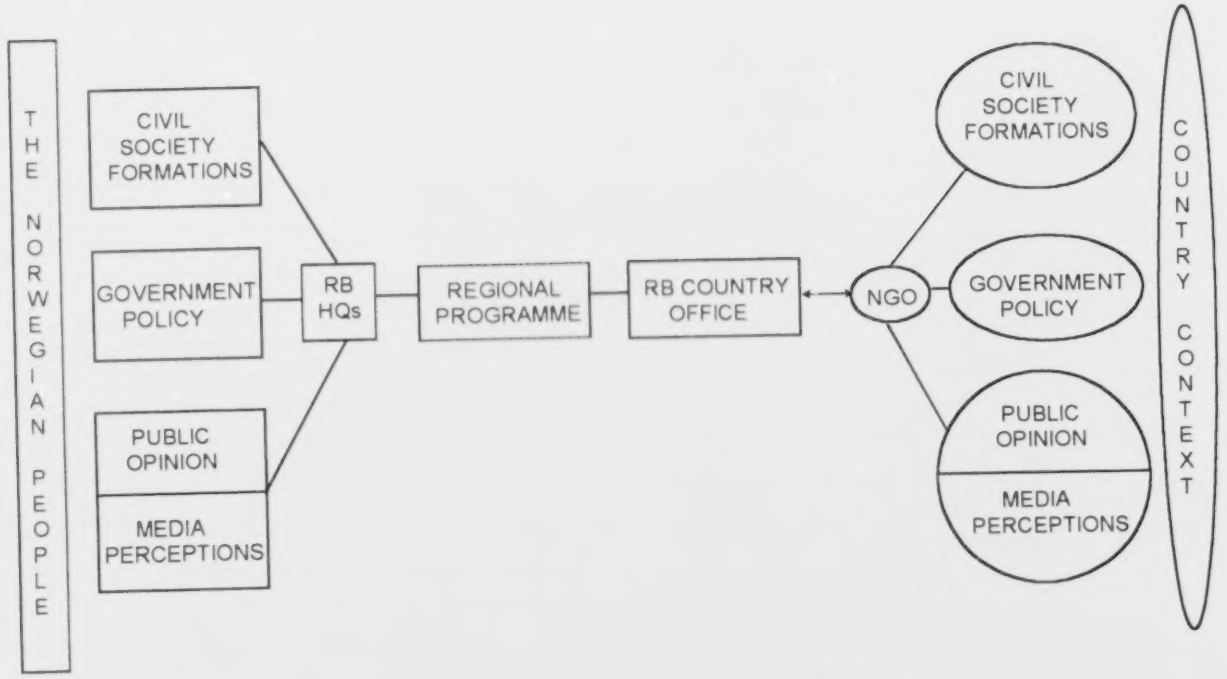

Table 1 Partnerships reflect multiple interests

International agreements and national policies often provide the parameters within which donor agencies operate. They may also define the geographical area in which they can work. But this is not always so and some agencies exercise a great deal of flexibility and independence in defining their scope and area of operation. The Norwegian people will have a say in Redd Barna's programme, even at the country level. The local NGO is similarly influenced and constrained by its environment and country context. The partnership between the two is played out against this multi-layered background. While the objectives of the two principal players, i.e., RB and the local NGO may be identical, there could easily be a clash of interests between the players involved at other levels.

3.1 Defining Development Partnerships

While the term partnership is now commonly used by donor agencies, there have been few systematic attempts to define it. This may not only be impossible but also not desirable as a fixed definition may limit the scope of partnership. It appears that most organizations are satisfied with a superficial description and appear uninterested in its many implications. Equally underplayed is the code of conduct that the parties involved should use to guide this relationship. Some examples are given below:

> "Partnership means a joint commitment to common goals, namely the search for solutions to the structural problems of poverty and hunger and for participatory development models based on democratic decision-making and on social equality. This involves shared responsibilities and mutual accountability regarding successes as well as failures. A partnership relation must be based on mutual knowledge, respect, transparency and trust." (OECD, 1988)

> "... a positive North/South collaborative relationship should include: mutual respect, trust, and equality; transparency or reciprocal accountability; understanding of each others' political/economic/cultural contexts and of institutional constraints; openness to

learning from each other; and a long-term commitment to working together." (World Development, 1987)

"The ideal CFA/NGO partnership ought to be one where both partners, on equal footing, willingly combine their abilities and resources for a mutual objective pursued in solidarity with the poor and their organizations." (Willi Kawohl, 1991)

What is striking here is the emphasis on the ethical or moral dimensions of partnership. Honesty, trust, equality, solidarity, openness, accountability, respect and collaboration are given prominence. But partnership is not an altruistic alliance—it will only flourish when there is a healthy dose of self-interest as well. All partners should benefit, otherwise no partnership would last long. Partners should be open about their gains and advantages, and not hide these behind a smoke screen of "good causes".

CARE Sri Lanka argues that working through partnership has positive effects on sustainability, efforts to attain scale, costs, development vision, responsiveness to local needs, and the learning process (Care 1997). FORUT, a Norwegian NGO, also active in Sri Lanka, sees partnership as an intermediary step within a development process (FORUT 1995). Save the Children (UK), South Asia, speaks about "building alliances" for children (SCF 1996). Other agencies see partnership between international and domestic development operations as key to generating greater efficiency and results because they use resources effectively and allow for better sharing of practices (USAID 1996). It is also recommended that partnerships should be based on both needs and existing assets.

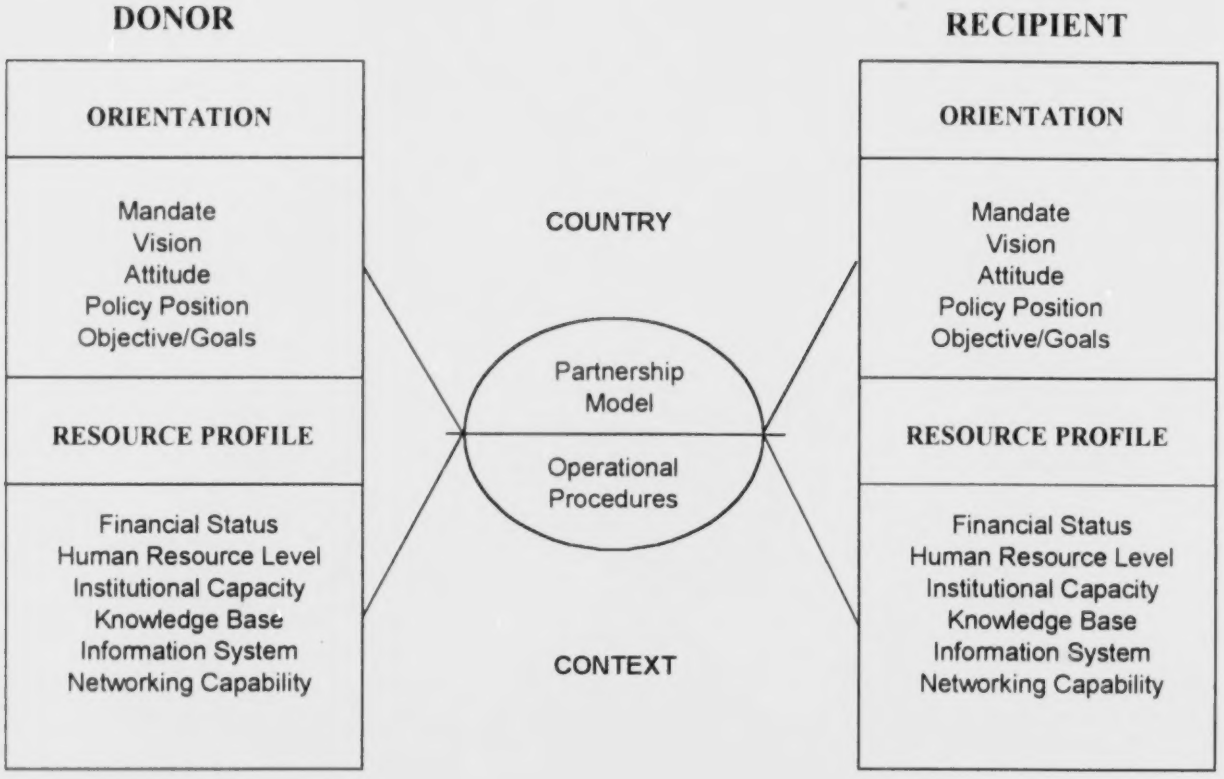

Table 2 Features of development partnerships

RB-Oslo, its field offices and partners have also been active in seeking to define partnership. RB-Oslo has initiated the debate by producing a discussion paper that provides a comprehensive view on the current state of affairs and on the position of Redd Barna itself. They also offer a checklist that can be used in forming and maintaining partnerships. Similar views are emerging from RBs field offices and partners.

Prerequisites of partnership

- partners should have compatible goals and values
- the primary focus of the expected results should be children
- partners should know each other well
- participatory processes should be encouraged
- the relationship should be equitable, collaborative, voluntary, transparent, and mutually accountable
- there should be an equality of commitment
- strategic management, planning, monitoring and evaluation should be intrinsic parts of partnership
- partnerships should be established through negotiation of the respective roles and contributions of each of the partners, and
- partnership should be viewed as a dynamic relationship which can change over time.

RB-Oslo, "Partnership—A Discussion Paper for Redd Barna and Partners", 1996

3.2 Features of Development Partnerships

The definitions provided above are, in the main, prescriptive and idealistic statements of how development partnerships ought to operate. They list the goals, features and principles that should make up a partnership between donors and local agencies. As with many other concepts that are popular in development discourse, there is a considerable gap between rhetoric and reality. Effective partnership remains a distant goal for the majority of development agencies. It is obvious from accumulated experience that partnership is a complicated business. There are no short cuts to it and no easy solutions. A development partnership is generally not a one-off event or a single transaction made between anonymous

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actors in an impersonal context. Rather, it is a process which takes time to unfold and which requires continual monitoring and adjustments.

So, what is common to the above definitions? What are the elements underlying a development partnership? Table 2 depicts the interplay of the three key elements that make up the partnership between a donor and a recipient agency. The qualities that the partners bring into the relationship have been characterized as orientations and resource profile. The arena of creating, managing and sustaining the relationship is referred to as the partnership interface.

Orientations

Orientations refer to the attitudes and values of the partners and will be reflected in the mandate, vision, policy position and objectives of the organization. Some crucial questions about the orientations of the two partners would be: What

Goals of partnership

- child advocacy
- children's participation
- a clearer focus on children
- a concentration of efforts on early child development and children in especially difficult circumstances
- quality impact
- increased coverage
- cost efficiency
- capacity building through organizational and institutional development of partners
- networking nationally and internationally
- professionalization of Redd Barna staff, and
- localization

RB-Sri Lanka "Country Programme Strategy 1998-2001", Colombo, 1996

Definition of partnership

Participatory process for
Action programmes through
Resource sharing,
Technology transfer, sharing,
technical assistance,
Networking,
Empowering,
Re-constructive attitude,
Sustainability,
Human resource development,
Information exchange, and
Policy planning/strategies.

Presentation by Gauri Pradhan of CWIN, Nepal at the RB-Asia Seminar on Partnership, 7-9 November 1996, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

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motivates them? What is the extent and nature of solidarity between them? Do they share a common vision of social development? Are their objectives compatible?

Resource profiles

The two partners usually have sharply contrasting *resource profiles*. This applies to their financial status as well as to their respective levels of human, infrastructural, knowledge and informational development and to their networking capabilities.

Partnership interface

Their respective orientations and the resource profiles become the inputs into the construction of the *partnership interface*. This includes the operational procedures that guide the day-to-day management of the partnership. Decision-making, financial and accounting arrangements, evaluations, information flows, networking and modes of communication come into play. The partnership interface will also be influenced by the country and cultural context within which it is embedded.

Partnership model

The nature and interaction of these three components will define the *partnership model*. It could be vertically or horizontally structured, hierarchical or egalitarian, static or dynamic.

In reality there is a continuum of partnerships, with donor-client type relationships representing one end and more egalitarian relationships characterising the other. Table 3 presents the differing operational procedures that will characterize each model. These represent two extreme scenarios and will seldom be found in their entirety in real-life situations. However, it is useful to spell out the "ideal" in detail as it can serve as a yardstick against which partnerships can be measured. It can also provide the goal which organizations can aim to reach.

3.3 Some Perceptions of Development Partnerships

It is an interesting fact that the term partner is used predominantly by international donor agencies, multilateral funders and northern governments. Recipient agencies usually use more prosaic and down-to-earth terms to describe their donors. Their perceptions of how partnerships work in practice also offer a different vision of reality and are in sharp contrast to the more idealistic notions presented by donors.

Quotations from different parts of the world are given below. In general, these statements represent the views of individuals and agencies who are at

Table 3 Partnership interface

Operational procedures	Partnership model	
	donor-client	equal partners
strategic decision-making	top-down	participatory
project (re-)definition	donor controlled	consultative
financial control/accounting	one-way control	transparency; mutual accountability
evaluation	donor controlled	joint/mutual
information flows/networks	donor controlled	open-access
organizational culture	top-down	empowering

the receiving end of partnerships or who identify with them.

"In most cases the international NGOs ask us questions, which out of respect for their privacy and human integrity, we would never ask of them. Indeed, it is crucially important for us to identify true international friends and yet this process is more difficult for us than it is for the international NGOs." (Sithembiso Nyoni, Zimbabwe)

"... the legitimacy of NGO which are a creation of their First World counterparts depends on the quality of their programs and their approach to development. It also depends on what they are seen to represent ... Foreign NGOs can therefore be seen as a threat to local initiative and self-reliance unless mutual confidence is developed between the external and local agencies, and a real partnership is created for the common cause of the poor." (Sithembiso Nyoni, Zimbabwe)

"... international NGOs operate with a dynamic quite different from that of local NGOs. They are bureaucratic ... they put a high premium on Gladstonian concepts of accountancy: that is on the rendering of receipted accounts rather than on any form of program or output budgeting." (Charles Elliot, UK)

"... many donors put great emphasis upon `dialogue' with their `partners'. It is important to recognize two features of this dialogue. First, this is a dialogue of the unequal, and however many claims are made for transparency and mutuality, the reality is—and is seen to be—that the donor can do to the recipient what the recipient cannot do to the donor. There is an asymmetry of power that no amount of well-intentioned dialogue can remove." (Charles Elliot, UK)

"The relationships among NGDOs and IDCIs (international development cooperation institutions) ... express a set of tensions related to the interests, often contradictory, of power groups and governments. They are also related to the different interests of the IDCIs and the NGDOs and to the different points of view of their personnel on priorities, regional concerns and preferences, biographical backgrounds, and ideological options." (Mario Padron, Peru)

"The language of `concern for effectiveness', `accountability', `efficiency', `professionalism', etc., masks the real language that in fact says, `We have the money, the know-how and therefore the power.' The southern NGOs are quite aware that money and know-how spell *power* in the hands of the northern NGOs." (Kingston Kajese, Zimbabwe)

"In the context of the relationships between international NGOs and indigenous NGOs, there is little doubt that the frame of reference for the division of labor has been

dominated to a large extent by western priorities, sensitivities, and systems." (Kingston Kajese, Zimbabwe)

"... although we have been using the word partnership for a long time ... project implementation has been the main thrust, and funding the main link. And with one partner giving funds and another receiving them, all the inequalities enter the relationship." (Kamla Bhasin, India)

"[Northern NGOs] have an enormous amount of power. They are able to shape the lives of the organizations they support, not simply because they fund them, but also because of the processes and disciplines they require the organization to become involved in. The term `partner' only obscures what remains a very real power relation. The egalitarian label does not change reality." (Honor Ford-Smith, Jamaica)

"... foreign NGOs are a secretive lot. We do not know much about them ... we know little about how their hearts beat in Europe or America or Canada ... they work with such secrecy and opaqueness that it is right for an African to be suspicious about them." (Yash Tandon, Zimbabwe)

The message in these comments is loud and clear. Yet, such views are rarely expressed in the immediate presence of staff of funding organizations. Few recipient NGOs would be so unwise or so uncourteous. So long as there is a prospect of financial support, donors are warmly welcomed, listened to, and praised for their wisdom and insights. It is hard, if not impossible, for a donor to remain self-critical under these circumstances.

"... donor `cherry picking', treating NGOs like a buffet lunch, taking what they like and leaving the rest; unclear priorities; frequently changing personnel; a refusal to countenance overheads or income-earning investments; delays in decision-making; delays in sending money. The result is not a *strengthening* of Southern NGOs; it is a life of constant apprehension and a process that contributes to destabilization. And it is not *partnership*; it is the same old paternalism the South started to know when Portuguese navigators first sailed down the coast of West Africa." (Ian Smillie, Canada)

"If the rhetoric is stripped off many NGO-to-NGO `partnerships', what remains is mostly money. Direct funding, therefore, poses a threat to the very *raison d'etre* of many Northern NGOs." (Ian Smillie, Canada)

Donor agencies are not the only ones to blame for the failure of the partnership; local NGOs do not stand up to scrutiny either.

"It is as easy to mock the Weberian virtues [of bureaucracy] as it is to neglect the fact that if local NGOs are to become effective agents of change in their own environment, dishonesty, incompetence, indolence, excessive patronage and corruption are unlikely to be sources of strength." (Charles Elliot, UK)

"The present argument from the South often looks like a plea for power without responsibility, power in terms of unconditional funding from the North without responsibility either to the donors or the real partners in development, the poor". (Brian Pratt, UK)

"[NGOs preach] participation, partnership, democracy ... But internally they are strictly hierarchical organizations with dogmatic structures, often dependent on individualistic styles of management decision-making ..." (Brian Pratt, UK)

3.4 Asian Views on Development Partnerships

The concept of partnership is in itself not new to Asians and is rooted in their notions of solidarity, mutual respect and collaboration. But the way in which development partnerships are promoted may raise some cultural eye brows:

"... the Sinhalese word for partner is *havulkarya*. It has the connotation of somebody with whom you would indulge in a temporary, opportunistic business, with no intention on either side of its continuing. It is energized by mutual suspicion and distrust. It is also used in the context of a person with whom a deal, slightly illicit and short-term, may be made. On the other hand a donor is called a *dayaka sangvidhanaya* which translates as ' compassionate organization'. There is an accepted inequality, but not at the spiritual level. So when a donor becomes a partner there is confusion. You repudiate the spiritual inequality; you call me an equal when I am not". (Sunimal Fernando, INASIA, Colombo)

Others take the view that partnership is not just a new word for the donor-receiver dependent relationship but heralds a new approach where there is an interdependent relationship between organizations:

"... looking at this concept now with our hindsight, it seems surprising that RB-Nepal had taken so long to think of *partnership* as it could have expected to achieve its vision only in partnership with other NGOs and GOs, especially the latter ... Development,

ultimately, is the process by which people empower themselves to improve their lives. From that perspective, *partnership for development* makes sense". (Country Review Report of Redd Barna-Nepal, 1996)

The idea of interdependence is well understood and has been mentioned as the ultimate goal for partnership. Groups may start off in a dependent situation, become independent of each other's support for survival and then realize that they are part of an interdependent system, and are mutually indispensable to each other. The views of a Nepali NGO underscore these principles:

"... equality, respect to each other and shared vision are essential things ... we learn form each other and teach each other". (CWIN, Kathmandu, 1996)

Given this background, partnership does not come as a surprise:

"... the move to partnership is a natural progression in Nepal—historically and politically. So Oslo's vision is timely for Nepal". (Staff, RB-Nepal, 1996)

However, there is also awareness of new forms of contradictions that may emerge between North and North, South and South, and North and South:

"... the essence of partnership in development is always under threats and challenges". (CWIN, Nepal, 1996)

One of these threats is the perception of some local RB staff that the organization's move from implementation to partnership is a ploy to rid itself of staff or unwanted projects.

"... partnership is a bolt from the blue which only struck recently. Khmer staff are not sure what it means for them. The discussion on partnership is also confused by the fact that people's jobs are at stake. It is difficul. . › remain logical". (Staff, RB-Cambodia)

There may also be some concern about the reasons for RBs move to partnership. For some, self-implemented projects are but another way of working with partners:

"... use of the word partner instead of donor has created a lot of confusion. Even at senior levels some staff are arguing that by implementing projects they are also entering into a kind of partnership". (Staff, RB-Cambodia, 1996)

Partnership is also challenged by many Asian NGO staff who see this as the umpteenth fad of the development establishment to stay in business:

"... after basic needs, self-reliance, sustainability, empowerment, and now partnership, what's next?" (Sithuwama, Sri Lanka, 1997)

There is also the uncertainty, if not suspicion, that the distribution of rights and obligations will be stacked unfavourably against local organizations. It is common practice for Redd Barna to check the accounts of local partners, but would Redd Barna be prepared to open their books to public scrutiny? Asians have so far accepted, perhaps reluctantly, that Norwegians tell them how to raise their children, but:

"... would the Norwegians be willing to listen to the advice of Thai educators?" (Staff, RB-Thailand, 1996)

This opens up the wider issue of communication between field and headquarters. There is a strong feeling that the reality of the work with children and families is not presented in Oslo and to the Norwegian public in ways that Asians would recognize as theirs. The complaint was often heard that reporting formats and fundraising needs are more important than the actual content:

"... Oslo washes out local diversity and uniqueness. The Asian perspective gets lost on its way to Norway". (Staff, RB-Cambodia, 1996)

It is clear that the picture of partnership that comes to the fore is as diverse as the region itself. Local NGOs are evidently capable of speaking the partnership language and may act according to the script. Their main worry is whether, at the end of the day, donors really mean what they say about partnership.

4 MAKING DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS WORK

As a general observation it can be said that the progression from a donor/client-type to a partnership-type relationship does not emerge of its own accord. Much work and reflection is required to translate aspirations into practice. The organization has to go through "partnership building measures" which have implications for the entire organization—from RB-Oslo to RB country offices. An active policy decision from headquarters, coupled with a common understanding within the organization on the reasons for this move form a crucial first step. The various stages and instruments involved, the location of responsibility for their execution and monitoring, channels and structure of responsibility for decision-making and back up would also need to be clearly understood and established.

4.1 Setting the Scene

The following sets of questions help to clarify the different elements that have to be kept in mind in establishing a partnership. These questions were raised during field interviews, in the RB-Asia Seminar on Partnership, and are commonplace in the literature. They help set the scene for reviewing partnership-building.

- *What are the benefits of partnership?*

What is the added value? Can the same objectives be reached in other ways; with other partners? What do children stand to gain? What are the risks? Could autonomy, fundraising-niche, perks be lost? Do all parties have something to offer? Is this financial support, international expertise, local knowledge and experience, entry to networks, access to the target audience, resources, or management, programme development and advocacy skills?

- *Is there a genuine commitment to partnership?*

Is there a long-term commitment to it? Are the partners prepared to invest the time, staffing and additional resources required? Is there sufficient clari ty about mutual expectations, roles and responsibilities? Is there a willingness to change, to learn from each others' successes and failures, to share information, networks and decision-making? Does the organizational culture facilitate this arrangement?

- *Is there a shared vision?*

Do the partners share common goals, beliefs, values and principles? What do they understand by "development"? Do they have a track record? Do they share views about the "rights of the child"? Is there a shared organizational culture: is partnership, empowerment, participation, respect for diversity interpreted in the same way? Is there an understanding of each others' political, economic, cultural and institutional constraints?

- *Is there sufficient institutional and human resource capacity?*

What are the implications for staff? Will it require a change in their roles and responsibilities? Will it call for additional skills? Have they been adequately prepared to take on new assignments? Do donor agency staff have an in-depth knowledge of the country and region? Do they have skills in processing, relaying and brokering information? Can they plan long-term programme scenarios? Are NGO staff ready to take on new responsibilities such as fundraising and self-evaluation? Do the partners have complementary and supplementary skills?

- *What are the operational procedures?*

How is information communicated between partners? Is there open access to this communication? What is the importance given to written records and institutional memory? Is there flexibility in reporting requirements and agreement on evaluation indicators. Is joint or mutual evaluation possible? Is there openness and mutual accountability in financial reporting? Is decision-making transparent and participatory? Who controls networks and information? Is it possible to have informal partnership arrangements?

- *Do the partners have a "learning agenda"*

Are there mechanisms for problem identification? How can partners learn from each other and share their respective experience and expertise? Are successes, failures and sensitive issues honestly reported? Is there a capacity to learn from untapped knowledge and experience at field level? And to inform the field? Is there an institutional memory? Is it recorded in a manner that it leads to organizational, as opposed to individual, learning? Is evaluation used as a tool for mutual learning and for redefining strategies and priorities? How can we, international staff, stay in touch with local communities?

- *Can partners be different and equal?*

> "Nepali society is based on semi-feudal relationships. We talk about equality, but it is not there. We have to practice it, to feel it inside ourselves."
> *Staff, RB-Nepal*

Is it feasible to maintain a productive relationship between unequal partners? What is the difference between equality and sameness? How will inequalities be dealt with? How should you relate to a partners who is more powerful, better resource, has more prestige and is better connected? Or the reverse: how to relate to a partner who is weak, poorly resource and working in isolation? Should the partners be empowered so that they can sustain a relationship as equals? Is capacity building a necessary precondition? Are flexible and longer-term funding arrangements more empowering? Is there an understanding of the consequences of empowering and participatory practices? Can donors empower and create self-reliance without creating clones?

- *How will the partnership be maintained?*

Are there any mechanisms for evaluating the quality of the partnership? How are conflicts resolved and diverging interests dealt with? Is there a capacity to respond to the internal and external dynamics of the partnership? Does long-term investment in one partner lead to "clientism" and favouritism? Can this be balanced by involvement with new partners and new networks? Can partnerships change as a result of changes in contractual agreements? Is it sometimes necessary to break or end a partnership?

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This long list of questions is not complete and could easily be expanded. The RB-Nepal office, for example, uses a check list to assess its partnership building. Lists of this kind can serve as reminders of how complicated the formation of partnerships really is. Every individual and organization is likely to have a different opinion on what partnerships should entail and how they should be built. These views may also vary across countries and regions.

In tackling some of these issues during fieldwork, it became obvious that there are several far reaching implications for Redd Barna's programme activities in Asia and for its organizational development. The following sections highlight the lessons learnt from this exercise and have been supplemented by current thinking on development management issues. They have been put into a framework that will facilitate programme and policy development with partners.

4.2 Programme Development

In addition to moving away from self-implementation of projects to working through partner agencies, there has been a policy shift in RB away from an "activity" orientation to an "issue" orientation. The rationale for focusing on issues is that this will enable RB to take a more direct approach in implementing its child-focused mandate as opposed to concentrating on activities which tend to become ends in themselves. The following priority issue areas have been singled out for RB support:

- Child-centred community development;
- Work with children in especially difficult circumstances;
- Child advocacy;
- Emergency relief.

These priority areas are fairly broad and allow country offices to focus on a collection of individual projects. Moving from a situation of sets of disparate projects to a coherent and focused programme would require a new approach to project support and programme development. It will call for different kinds of planning and grant-making procedures. Some existing projects may have to be discontinued, modified or reinforced and others newly developed. Staff will have to change their orientation and may have to acquire new skills and establish new professional contacts.

- *Features of a programme*

What is a programme? A programme may be defined as a series of events created to attain clearly formulated goals at a country or global level. It should consist of a coherent set of interrelated, well described activities, a plan of action with concrete objectives, strategies and tangible outcomes. A programme should follow an anticipated time path and operate within a pre-determined financial framework. The discrete activities within such a programme could be manifold, short or long-term and could be carried out by distinct, but collaborating, organizations or individuals. In addition to activities benefiting children and their families undertaken by child and family workers, a programme could include initiatives by others which could lead, for example, to extensive networking, documentaries, training courses, seminars, monographs, or new lines of educational materials. With in the terms of a programme, these various interventions should mutually reinforce each other and work towards shared goals.

Ideally, a country programme should draw on a country study providing general information about the country as well as specific details about the needs of children. It should include information on legislation, policies and practices with respect to children and families; map out the programmes of other child-focused international and local agencies; identify existing "

good policy and practice" as well as gaps in existing interventions and policies for children. After an intensive dialogue with partners and independent resource persons, and based on a situation analysis of children and their families, a central theme or focus can be identified around which to develop programme activities. It should include a statement of overall objectives, areas of emphasis, implementation strategies, expected impact on children and the human and financial resources available to implement this.

There are several advantages to having a coherent programme clustered around a specific theme. The most obvious one is to do with the scale of the organization. Instead of making a small contribution in several fields, scarce resources could be used to make a significant impact in selected priority areas. Specialization would also allow a relatively small staff group to deepen their knowledge, experience and skills around specific issues and thereby develop high-quality interventions on behalf of children.

Thematic specialization would allow cross-country sharing of experiences, provide substance to inter-project networking activities and promote "learn ing by doing" at the organizational level in a more systematic way. It also stands a better chance of contributing to policy formulation, rallying public support and increased funding. Having said this, it is vital to remember that the selection of a thematic focus should not take away the flexibility to respond to novel and experimental proposals and to newly emerging needs of children.

It is likely that the familiar, longer-term, grass-roots intervention projects will remain a mainstay component in the majority of country programmes. These interventions can demonstrate the immediate relevance of innovative work, test out strategies, train specialists, and influence policy and practice. The focus could be on a single target group, i.e., child prostitutes, street children or rural children; it could be on a single strategy, i.e., child-centre

community development; or it could have more than one target group and follow multiple strategies to achieve its objectives.

Country programmes may also contain smaller, short-term, "support" projects. Typically, these would be one-off activities that would contribute to the overall objectives of the country programme and could include activities such as a documentary on the project made by an independent producer, a survey carried out by a university, a training course developed by a college, or materials developed by a publisher.

Thinking along these lines, a country programme could consist of a multitude of "partners". Their common denominator would be that they would contribute to attaining the objectives of the programme. The personal aspects of partnership may get even more diluted when programmes take on the features of, or are incorporated into, "movements". In movements, partners are essentially like people playing their own instruments but using the same sheet of music.

- *Going to scale*

> "RB has strength in working with small groups. It is not good at capacity-building, going-to-scale and building federations".
> *Staff, RB-Nepal*

So far, the issue of increasing the coverage and impact of programmes has not been a major issue for discussion in RB-Asia. Any agency that takes the child as its target, rather than children in a particular community, should assess its efforts in this wider context. The programmatic implications of not working in, or being unaware of, the larger context are profound and may even turn out to be counter-productive. One of the main hazards is that the model or methodology followed may turn out to be unsuitable for dis-

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semination or replication because it may be too expensive or too uniquely financed, too complicated, requiring too much training, or inapplicable in other contexts.

The processes of going-to-scale are beginning to be understood and a few lessons can already be drawn from the experience gathered during the last ten years.[8] The most important lesson, perhaps, is that dissemination and replication of small pilot experiences is not an easy and straightforward activity. It is all too common for the significant features of the original project to get distorted, or to disappear altogether. Insensitivity to situational variables, ignoring local participation and mechanical replication are some of the reasons that cause programmes to lose their effectiveness.

The interest in replicating and disseminating programmes is also motivated by economic arguments. It is reasoned that since there are already sufficient "models" or illustrations of "good practice" there is no need for further experimentation or piloting. It would be far better to use scarce resources to help good practice expand and replicate than once again start up a so-called "innovative", "alternative" project.

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[8] For a detailed review of these issues, see Van Oudenhoven & Wazir (1996b).

The majority of local NGOs are too engaged in coping with the immediacy of their situation and are, therefore, not in a position to take sufficient distance or to place their activities in a wider perspective. Such an approach leaves the situation of the large majority of children at risk unaltered. Programming for children can be effective only when the dimensions of the sit uation are taken into account and attempts are made to develop appropriate strategies which have a wider relevance.

Donors and NGOs committed to meeting the needs of large numbers of children at risk should, therefore, address the issue of programme expansion from the onset. RB and local NGOs should jointly reflect on these considerations if they are to reach a larger number of children in need. NGOs should make the issue of going-to-scale a separate plank in their programme development strategy. This would give their current work with children an additional dimension as their activities would also have to be assessed in terms of their potential to grow. This is a totally new approach and it challenges, in particular, those NGOs that are restricted to offering services exclusively to children in their own constituencies. Often, the facilities offered to a few takers have to be reoriented completely when larger numbers have to be reached. For example, expensive centre-based child care in slum areas may have to give way to lower cost and sustainable home-based care.

Moving programmes to scale and sustaining them requires special managerial and administrative skills. The funding arrangements are also completely different from those of smaller projects. People involved in experiment ing, developing or exploring new ideas are motivated in a different manner from those who have to promote a proven methodology. Another factor to reckon with is that large endeavours may be seen as threatening as they have a bearing on local and national policy and impinge on activities traditionally delivered by the government.

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The assignment for programme developers is to combine quality with quan tity, to reach out to as many children as possible and yet offer good care in as short a time as possible. This is a complex task and not many examples of effective, large-scale programmes for children are available. The experience so far suggests that a decentralized approached that involves collabo rating GOs, NGOs, grass-roots organizations and private initiatives holds the most promise. Large-scale programmes flourish best in a climate where the government assumes a policy formulating, facilitating and overall monitoring role; the professional input of NGOs is recognized; and local groups, including parents, exert control and bring in "local expertise".

As regional and international experience is emerging, RB is well placed to enact a catalyst role. RB could document examples of "good practice" inter nationally; highlight the pros and cons of the various dissemination models; organize training and information workshops; or develop other fora for bringing NGOs and resource people together.

- *Sustainability*

With RB going to partnership, the question of the sustainability of the projects takes on an important dimension. The majority of development programmes list the attainment of sustainability as one of their main objectives. However, even a cursory evaluation shows that only a few succeed in achieving it. Most externally-sponsored programmes collapse or have to be substantially reduced when funding dries up. This phenomenon is as common in the North as it is in the South. Programme developers of donor organizations as well as local

> In poor countries, there are just not enough resources around and it is an illusion to believe or make believe that any self-reliant scheme will alter this. Striving to sustain an externally-led intervention is, in essence, shifting the burden from the donor to local bodies.

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implementers tend to overlook the long-term implications of their interventions. The complexities involved in making a programme sustainable are not fully appreciated from the outset or are given attention only at a later stage.

Any earnest discussion should start with the observation that sustainability is often not possible without outsider support. Accepting this statement may make the debate more realistic and focus the attention on other ways of making interventions durable. The target groups of development programmes are there because they are poor, or do not have the means to improve their situation by themselves. They are also there because mainstream society does not find it important enough to improve their condition and because the state and society have other priorities. Even if the people in the slums or remote rural areas would organize themselves, health and child care would only improve up to a point.

Sustainable development is usually understood to refer either to the survival of the organization and its staff or of its programme activities. Although these components are interrelated, they call for different strategies. A well-managed organization is known to be a critical factor in the success of large-scale development programmes (Paul, 1982). Skills in administration, bookkeeping, personnel development, training, planning, filing and documentation, organizing meetings, reporting, and fundraising are crucial in enabling organizations to deliver programmes successfully. Similarly, an array of "tools" may be used to ensure the sustainability of programme activities. The most productive are community involvement, advocacy, fundraising, and coalition-building with governmental and non-governmental organizations.

A third form of sustainability refers to the continuation of ideas, vision and skills. For example, the "social energy" that is developed by programmes dealing with child advocacy, child rights and improved policies and

services for children will continue to benefit children long after the termination of the project. The new approaches developed, the insights gained and the invaluable lessons learnt in the course of their working for children, their families and the community will not necessarily be lost. In this case sustainability will be measured in terms of the continued impact on the lives of children.

External donors have a moral obligation that goes beyond the rules and reg ulations of the contractual agreements that they sign with their partners. They have the obligation to ensure that their actions do not have a detrimental effect on the constituency that they attempt to serve. It is also well accepted that the cause of development is not served by creating undue dependency. Keeping these general principles in mind, RB could enhance its support to making its NGO partners stronger and financially secure. The first step would be to draw up a sustainability plan outlining clear objectives, strategies, and specifying the responsibilities of RB and the partner NGO. RB could play a key role in providing access to training and expertise in areas such as proposal writing and in seeking alternative sources of income. It could encourage NGOs to document and publish their project ex periences and stimulate their networking activities.

More recently, endowment funds are being given attention as one way of ensuring the sustainability of local groups. The advantage of an endowment is apparent: it can provide the programme with a steady flow of income. Yet, very few international donors see endowments as a means to securing

While donors generally prefer long-term financing over the setting up of endowment funds, it is not uncommon for recipients to come to the conclusion that if all the monies spent on a programme had been put up-front in an endowment, the programme could have continued from the interests gained on this capital.

the sustainability of a programme and Redd Barna is no exception. The establishment of endowments is not even an issue for discussion.

From what can be gathered internationally, endowments are looked upon with suspicion as they can be easily abused or mismanaged by the recipient, seem complicated to establish and discourage programme staff from looking for local funding. As all these objections can be countered other reasons may play a role, albeit in less outspoken ways. One such reason may be that by allowing recipients to draw on an endowment fund, donors lose their control over the recipient. Under regular funding conditions, recipients have to approach donors for project extensions, send in reports for approval, welcome them on field visits, and consult and listen to them. These are powerful tools in the hands of donors and the reluctance to give up these privileges should not be underestimated.

Endowments have the potential to lessen the dependency of recipients on outside donors and, with this dependency out of the way, lay the found ation for a true partnership.

Endowments can be installed in many ways and codes of conduct can be worked out by mutual consent. Endowment funds will work best for mature, democratic and open organizations. Recipients could only be allowed drawing rights, or auto-destruct mechanisms could be installed to prevent deviation from agreed-upon rules. The ramifications of endowment funds have not yet been fully explored. A fresh look is required into what is essentially an old idea.

Can sustainability be attained without the collaboration of local partners? This question can only be answered positively if the donor is prepared to finance the activity permanently or to set up an endowment arrangement. Lo cal partners will be needed to root the programme in society, to ensure that it is flexible as well as responsive to new needs and to keep it relevant.

Longer-term financial support can only be expected when the local partners and stakeholders join in.

- *Networking*

Without exception, local NGOs value the networking opportunities provided by RB. RB is part of an ever-extending matrix of contacts and linkages which include specialists at all levels from many parts of the world and it has free communications with a wide gamut of organizations and groups. RB also has the institutional capacity and the credibility to expand its networks and to include others in it.

> "Networking can become not-working".
> *CWIN, Nepal*

Local NGOs, on the contrary, have more difficulty in developing, updating and maintaining their networks. It is not uncommon for them to work in isolation or to be unaware of developments in their own region. Their efforts to reach out are impeded by technical and resource limitations. Actively reach ing out to new or unfamiliar contacts requires a range of social, communication, language, diplomatic, and even administrative skills which are not always present in NGOs. Their staff are primarily action-oriented, inter ested in working directly with children. They have not come to their job with the intention of moving around in increasingly widening circles. Some NGO staff are not aware of the advantages of extending their professional contacts. They feel that they have enough, or even too much on their hands. They are "overwhelmed" by their own work and do not see how they could make time for such an activity, or how networking could relieve their work pressure.

Networking has become an indispensable activity for NGOs, and like their counterpart organizations in other parts of the world, local NGOs need stronger networks. It is mainly through improved networking that NGOs can firm up their financial base, impact policy, expand their outreach, and, most importantly, learn from others. More significantly, networking creates the conditions for self-generated learning. If brought in touch with the right mix of contacts, avenues for improving their work, accessing training and other resources and possibilities for coalition building can all be explored. The one-sided dependency on the donor agency gives way to autonomous and joint action.

Horizontal and vertical networking, i.e., the development of links with similar organizations as well as those up and down the hierarchy, has been identified as an essential feature of successful NGOs. This implies that NGO staff need to acquire the skills to relate to people and organizations belonging to different interest groups and organizational cultures. It also entails that NGOs need access to quality networks. Although networking is now an indisputable part of development jargon, the processes involved in it, its pitfalls and the skills for it are described only in vague terms, if given attention at all.

It is tempting for most donor agencies to invite NGOs to participate in networks that are controlled by the agencies themselves.

NGOs may attend a meeting organized by the donor and meet other agencies and individuals who are linked in some way to the donor. NGO staff may be sent on field trips to see projects or to training courses selected by the donor. This kind of networking may initially help an NGO to get started but it should not stop there. From a development perspective, it is far more effective to encourage NGOs to go over and beyond the donor's " own" networks.

The facilitating potential of RB, especially in the area of networking, is vast. In the main, local NGOs are not in a position to carry out an ongoing and close study of networking possibilities at various levels. RB could fulfil a vital role here by surveying the national, regional and international situation. Another option for RB would be to bolster existing networks. There is a growing body of evidence that pleads for strengthening approach es that are already in place and building on these. There is, indeed, a global trend to look closer at "what works" rather than to invest in finding "new" solutions.

RB's intention to be a partner to local NGOs should find a growing express ion in its ability to help these NGOs to develop and sustain their own independent networks. In addition to financial inputs, RB should be prepared to offer training on how to go about networking to young NGOs.

- *Selecting partners*

Who should be a partner? The partnership between RB and children is a symbolic relationship which cannot be formalized by a legal contract. How ever, individuals, loosely-formed groups, community organizations, NGOs, universities and government agencies are concrete entities and it is possible, in principle, to enter into formal or informal relationships with them. A legally-binding contractual arrangement can be drawn up with individuals or with unregistered local organizations, just as it can with a registered NGO or government department. The Asian experience shows that flexibility is required in making this decision as there can be no blanket recommendations which suits all the countries concerned.

The desirability of entering into partnerships with unregistered entities is best assessed individually for each country. There could be political reasons for doing so, as in the case of dictatorial regimes, like Burma,

where civil organizations are banned. The decision could also be justified on developmental grounds. Support to grass-roots organizations, community formations and parents' groups could then be seen as part of a longer-term strategy of capacity-building. This would be the case in Cambodia where non-governmental organizations are a relatively new phenomenon.[9]

Selecting the right kind of partners is a first step in ensuring the success of partnerships. Time spent in getting to know the organization to make sure that there are no serious incompatibilities can save considerable disappointment and frustration in the future. It will also enable both sides to become aware of each other's strengths. It is not necessary for organizations to be identical. While recognizing diversity, there should be agreement around a core set of values. This is all the more important when the partnership concerns two inherently unequal parties (donors/recipients) and when the dependence is perceived as being one-sided.

> Equality should certainly not be used by donors to hide their embarrassment at having financial power and resources which are unavailable to the local recipient agencies.

There is general agreement that it is feasible to maintain a productive relationship between partners who are not identical. Equality should not be equated with sameness, or with having similar responsibilities, objective or motivations. Instead of using equality as a starting point, it is often more useful to see the partnership as an inter-dependent relationship that is given direction

[9] It could also be required by the organizational mandate: when the objective is to give scholarships or sponsorships to individuals. This does not apply in the case of RB.

by a joint vision and trust. The donor's financial power is counterbalanced by the local knowledge and hands-on experience of recipient organizations.

> Organizations may not be fully prepared for the consequences of empowerment. For example, indigenous NGOs could ask to see the financial accounts of their donors; they could ask for mutual evaluations and for participation in strategic policy decisions. In order to be truly participatory and empowering, donors would have to be prepared to open themselves to the same scrutiny to which they subject NGOs.

The attainment of the status of equality comprises many components and includes such vital attitudes as trust, self-confidence and respect. It also includes more prosaic elements such as a clear understanding of mutual rights and obligations; transparency and accountability on both sides; an organizational vision with clarity about goals, strategies and priorities and clear and open lines of communication. Finally, before embarking on a partnership which is mutually beneficial, it is crucial that both parties should have the capacity to implement such a relationship. Thus, both would need to be empowered before they could sustain a partnership as equals. Donors would bear the major responsibility of assisting in building up these capacities by providing financial support and access to training, networks and other non-material resources.

4.3 Organizational Development

The change over to partnership adds a new dimension to the work of RB in Asia. It has consequences for the organizational structures and will impact the staff who make up the organization. Concepts such as participation, empowerment, interdependence, access to information, and decentralization of power will gain in significance and a stronger commitment will

be required to sustainability, networking, advocacy, and moving away from single projects to coherent programmes.

- *Implications for staff*

RB country offices have internationally recruited Resident Representatives (RR) and local programme and administrative staff. The RRs act as the link between headquarters and local staff; they represent the face of RB-Oslo; and it is their responsibility to ensure that the organization's vision for children is reflected in country programmes. A good RR is the absolute requirement for a good office and a good country programme. RRs bear prime responsibility to keep the organization in the vanguard of development practice.

> "Tell me the character of the Resident Representative and I will tell you the nature of Redd Barna's programme in the country".
> *Staff, RB-Sri Lanka, 1997*

The position of programme staff is equally pivotal as they stand at the interface between the international donor and the local recipient. The Programme Officer's task has traditionally been predominantly administrative, controlling and restrictive and largely dictated by the clauses and conditions of the terms of agreement between RB and its partners. It was more important for them to understand project operations than programme development and, subsequently, in recruiting programme officers, the search was for commen surate skills.

The introduction of partnership is linked to a change in the responsibilities of staff and would call for additional skills at all levels (including that of the RRs). They would have to develop an extensive and in-depth knowledge of the country and region; become versatile in the processing, relaying

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and "brokerage" of information; have the skills to chart and plan out long-term, flexible and comprehensive programme scenarios; develop relevant contacts nationally and internationally; and—most importantly—deepen their understanding of development theories and practices. It may be more appropriate to use the label of "programme developer" for such staff.

Programme developers play an important role in funding agencies. They di rect the amount and flow of monies and they make important decisions about the content and direction of the programmes they help to finance. However, it is impossible for them to possess the same intimate knowledge about children and their needs as programme implementors have, or to share or even appreciate the sophisticated insights of researchers. Yet, these officers are expected to speak out on children's issues; to decide which programmes to fund, where and for what children; assess outcomes of evaluations, and interact with researchers and practitioners. They often help to set the agenda at national and international fora as well as have an impact on the media.

> Would anybody take programme staff of donor agencies seriously if they were to be stripped of access to financial resources? What would they have anything of substance left to offer?

The crucial question that has to be posed is: what are the principles that should inform and guide the thinking and action of programme developers and on what grounds can they justify their decisions? Undoubtedly, the availability of funds helps explain the ready acceptance of their arguments by agencies looking for resources; the warm welcome extended to them; the appreciation of their wisdom; and their non-hierarchical mode of interaction. Locally-recruited RB staff feel that they have a privileged status on account of working for an international agency. A complaint heard in Sri Lanka,

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where many staff have been retrenched, was that it "affected their dignity and status in the community".

It is being suggested here that programme developers, even stripped of their "power and prestige" ought to be able to make a contribution to children's issues. They could do so by strengthening their expertise as development specialists; their networking position; their programme development approach; and by becoming credible advocates for their institutional mandate, in this case children. In most instances, these skills may have to be freshly recruited or be instilled in available staff. Partners, too, will look for new skills and expertise in RB if they are to see it as more than just a donor agency.

- *Communicating with partners*

Clear-cut, concrete, and open communications and well-defined rules of en gagement are a prerequisite for maintaining good relations between the donor agency and its partners. As multi-cultural situations can easily lead to misunderstandings and misconstrued perceptions, the way messages are communicated should be a subject of permanent concern. Continued efforts should be made to ensure that all substantive decisions are interpreted by both parties in the same manner.

At the most basic level, these efforts entail that all significant discussions are followed up by a written communication summarizing the decisions reached and the actions agreed upon. This allows both parties to make addi tional comments, should that be necessary. These documents should, in turn, be shared with the relevant staff within the organizations. In this way, reliable institutional relationships, rather than merely personal contacts can evolve between the two organizations. High turnover of programme staff,

as has been the case in some RB country offices, underlines the need for written records and an institutional memory.

Good record keeping also helps to distinguish personally-held views from those held formally by RB. Although personal contacts and a strong commitment to projects are desirable, it should not lead to a sense of "ownership" by the responsible officer. Such a perception may narrow down, or even disturb the communication between the project and RB. While maintaining prime responsibility for the project with the designated project officer, it is advisable to establish multiple contact points with the NGO partner. This would allow more than one person within the donor agency to have access to information and communication with the NGO.

In working with its project partners RB should ensure that decisions regarding important matters such as assessment of proposals, project evaluation, continuation of funding and additional funding are conducted in a transparent manner. These decisions should also be framed in concrete guidelines or parameters. These guidelines should help the writing of proposals. They are more than checklists and should be understood in the context of a country programme and of the mandate of the donor. In the final analysis, these guidelines should serve the interests of the target group, i.e., children.

- *Strategic management*

It would be beyond the capability of the staff of most donor agencies to give expert feedback at all times and on all the areas listed above. Instead of attending to all matters themselves, it would be more fruitful for staff to opt for "strategic management". This concept acknowledges the growing awareness that the relationship with projects should change, that staff and material resources could be better used and that project monitoring could be more effective. Strategic management is, therefore, outcome-oriented. It requires that resources—staff as well as financial—should only be spent on those activities that further the objectives of the country programme. It means that staff should endeavour to increase local support capacity for projects, instead of getting involved with action on the ground themselves.

Strategic monitoring also entails that an agreement should be reached with project partners on priority areas and project monitoring should, then, largely deal with these topics. Singling out a few priority monitoring issues would not exclude keeping an eye on financial and other reporting. Donors are afraid of misappropriation of funds. Stories about corruption in the South are rife in the North; and fundraising INGOs don't wish their constituents to think that the monies entrusted to them are mishandled. Projects should be helped to become capable of "self-generated learning" which is manifest in self-evaluation, self-monitoring and also self-accounting. It should also lead to the identification and resolving of problems and increased accountability.

> Strategic management is not the same as more checks, more rules and regulations and more paper work. This is seen as a sign of distrust and a ploy by the donor to retain control.

Mechanisms and tools are available which will facilitate the development of these practices. The provision of locally available training is one of the most important tools to improve the functioning of projects. This would include the identification of training needs of project staff and finding appropriate training for them. Project work can also be reinforced by making available resource materials—manuals, training videos, guides, data banks and references; developing issue-oriented agendas; promoting networking and joint activities and organizing thematic workshops.

It is obvious that the staff of RB cannot have expertise in all aspects of child development research and practice. Use should be made of external resource persons or specialized agencies to provide information on specific issues or to help formulate constructive approaches. Partner organizations could play an effective role in supplying this expertise; in fact, a key reason for extending the network of partners may be to provide a platform for exchanging complementary skills.

- *Staff development*

In keeping with policy changes already instituted in RB, programme officers now have expanded roles and responsibilities. The move to programme development and strategic monitoring would call for even greater skills. While new staff can be recruited on the basis of an adjusted profile, existing staff would have to be adequately prepared to take on their new assignments. RB management would be required to play an active role in devising and implementing this staff training plan.

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> "The discussion of a project proposal is the key to partnership. That's how you get to know the people. Then you learn a common language".
> *Staff, RB-Sri Lanka*

In-house discussions and studies are the most effective means by which the contours of a new operational style can be defined. These discussions can focus around the assessment of new proposals, on new trends in research and practice or on lessons learnt from the organization's own experiences in the field. Exposure to the work of NGOs is in itself a prime source for training. In this process, staff can upgrade their skills, improve their understanding of development issues and, most importantly, develop an affinity with the new approach.

Staff should be aware of the "development paradox" which regularly baffles development agencies. The paradox appears when the expertise and knowledge of an agency reaches such high levels that it far exceeds the capacity of collaborating NGOs. The tendency for the agency is then to foreclose discussions with the NGOs and lock them out from essential decision-making processes. Development agencies should, therefore, seek to acquire skills that are supplementary and contributory to those of NGOs. This dynamic also entails that the mosaic of partnership continuously changes.

- *Resource development*

> RB is well-placed to become a resource centre for NGOs. The organization itself is a large information processing and communication system.

NGOs need to obtain as well as to generate information. This is an essential component of institutional empowerment. They also need to reach out to diverse audiences and "package" the informa-

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tion accordingly. They may wish to hand out simple leaflets, write texts for newspapers; or they may opt for sophisticated multi-media approaches. The setting up and maintenance of an information/communication service calls for resources and skills that are usually not within the reach of NGOs. Collaboration with others and using services of specialized groups on a part-time basis is a familiar way of resolving this lack of capacity. However, it still requires specialized skills to conceptualize, supervise and evaluate the products, or even to identify reliable partners.

RB has the potential to facilitate the flow of documentation to partners and also to keep news clippings, books, articles and international resources. It could collect and publish relevant documents on children; undertake the translation of relevant experience and publications and also set up a data bank on names and addresses of persons and organizations that could serve the NGOs. The outreach capacity of such a resource centre will certainly grow with the ever-increasing access to cheap and customer-friendly electronic communication systems.

Interacting through Internet and accessing the information available there will change the nature of RBs partnerships. This discussion has not even started yet.

Life in cyberspace will not diminish the need for human interfacing; this is likely to increase commensurately, and the centre could initiate workshops, field trips and otherwise get people in touch with each other. These resource functions will enable RB to reach out to many audiences with rela tively little finances. In some countries, such as Thailand, RB could cease to be a traditional donor while still maintaining its partnerships, or even extending them, by assuming the role of a resource organization.

5 BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN IN ASIA

Redd Barna's work in the four countries has a varied history but also tends to follow a pattern. The starting point was usually with relief and rehabilitation followed by general community development and child-focused com munity development projects. It is only since 1995 that RB has made a serious commitment to supporting programmes directly benefiting children. [10] Redd Barna's position on children is also reflected in its General Guidelines for International Programmes, which have been formulated recently. The guidelines take as their twin goals the overall development of children and the protection of their rights. They also list a number of programme principles which draw on the needs and rights of children. As such they provide the conceptual framework in which to develop programme activities. Without such guidelines, child-focused programmes may easily go astray.

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[10] See "Programme Handbook", Redd Barna, Oslo, 1995.

> Why did it take RB so long to discover the child? Its very name "Save the Children" is a constant reminder of its mandate and mission. Should the work of RB not be analyzed and understood in terms of its ultimate impact on children?

Instead of promoting a particular strategy RB now directs its attention to identifying and supporting good programmes directly benefiting children. This has moved the organization closer to meeting the needs of children and given its country offices the opportunity to choose the most appropriate ways of attaining this end. It signifies an appreciation of contextual variables and of the fact that different situations can call for different approaches. This is a promising avenue as it allows local NGOs to explore alternative scenarios or pilot new practices. At the same time, it permits RB to choose from a wider range of options.

The availability of a mission statement and programme guidelines, does not, however, guarantee child-focused action on its own accord. It requires staff and partners who know about children's issues, are committed to working with and on behalf of children, and who have the motivation and skills to connect with children and their care-givers.

5.1 Targeting Children

Questions such as—should children be singled out as a target group; should they be direct beneficiaries of development programmes; how should the impact of programmes on children be measured—continue to be debated by child-development specialists, practitioners, development agencies and policy-makers.[11] RB's experience in Asia allows for several

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[11] In the main, children and youth are conveniently left out of this equation; they still do not participate in decision-making which touches on their lives. It is only

observations and contributions to be made to this ongoing discussion. These issues have a direct bearing on the partnerships of child-related donor agencies.

Several reasons are given by those who believe that children should have priority in development programmes. First, there is the moral obligation to support the vulnerable. This obligation has now become internationally accepted law and is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A second and important political reason is that communities and societies at large are more at peace and in balance when they see that their children are taken care of.

More recently, NGOs implementing programmes for children have come under increasing pressure from powerful donor agencies to show the benefits of child programmes to the society at large. Investing in children is, as the term suggests, now becoming a predominantly economic concern. The key objective is to turn children into productive adults who will pay taxes. It is believed that neglected children will cost society more: they will need extra medical care, will repeat classes in school, will under-perform as workers, will have large families, or otherwise become a burden for their country. Consequently, implementing agencies are pushed to include economic indicators in their evaluations or adjust their programmes so that they may produce positive economic outcomes.

Although the search for long-term effects of child-related programmes is legitimate, it carries with it the inherent danger of looking at children only as future adults, and not as deserving of attention in their own right. The CRC recognizes children as inherently important, regardless of their future status, or the future outcomes of intervention programmes. Children have

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gradually being understood that they too should be heard and be allowed to chart out their own destinies.

the right to receive care, even when it cannot be "proved" that this care will be translated in terms of positive outcomes later on in their lives. This is the true meaning of putting children in focus and is, perhaps, the most important lesson that has been learnt or should be learnt in Asia and elsewhere.

It is sometimes argued that children form an integral part of the society in which they live and as such cannot be reached effectively unless the environmental conditions under which they live are also improved. This is a valid argument and some environmental improvements do have direct bene fits for children. For example, better playgrounds, improved nutrition, health-monitoring, or schools have immediate positive results. However, not all general improvements necessarily reach the child. While in theory they should have a bearing on the development of children, their effects in practice may be minimal.

A different kind of argument is presented by adherents of the community development approach. It is generally assumed that the community should be allowed to decide its own priorities and strengthening the community will affect the lives of children accordingly. Community development is still seen as a good means or an opportune way to reach children as it is believed that programmes for children can be effective only if they are rooted in and supported by the community.

Children's programmes can all too easily become entry points for more gen eral community action. In seeking to improve the lives of children, projects may be mounted to alleviate poverty, reorganize village societies, improve agricultural output, construct a road, establish a health post or a rice bank. It can be argued that each of these single interventions will have a positive impact on children. In practice, however, it may not always bear out that way. Income may accrue only to the elite, or to a single segment of the com

munity. In spite of all good intentions, the child often gets lost in such programmes.

It is detrimental to the cause of children if the spin-offs of such programmes were the only justifications for action for children. A child focus can only be maintained if the complexities, dynamics, and implications of intervention processes are clear and the intervening links between initial programme input and impact on children are understood. Put in simple terms, the following questions should be raised of any intervention: what is the impact on children and what is required to sustain it?

5.2 Measuring Impact

It is not uncommon for development agencies to repeatedly refine their policies, programme objectives and strategies in keeping with current trends and concerns. In general, their attempts at self-evaluation usually stop at this point. Their constituencies, whether they be donors, boards of trustees, volunteers or the public are usually satisfied when the agency's target group and accompanying working philosophy are appealing.

> "Redd Barna has found time and again that the traditional community development model does not always improve the health, education and security of children in the way project proposals set out. Most honest project evaluations in development literature show that people in the middle and top of local social hierarchies tend to benefit most from project inputs, and women and children the least ... hoped for effects on children could be more substantial and easier to sustain if children were kept systematically in focus in planning and monitoring the projects."
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> *Wam, 1994*

This means that the question about the impact of their programmes on children and on children's development is hardly ever raised. This aspect also appears to be missing from the work of many child development agencies.

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Instead of looking at the impact of programmes on the lives of children, circumstantial indicators of effectiveness are often used. One may look at the number of teachers or health workers trained instead of looking at academic performance or changes in the number of sick children. Likewise, it may be argued that the establishment of a network of independent, child-oriented NGOs will not automatically lead to more healthy and well developed children.

To assess the impact of an intervention on children, meaningful childhood-development indicators are required. Infant and under-five mortality rates can serve as crude but useful bench marks of child health. Weight for height, and height for age are similarly effective indicators of the nutritional status of children. The advantage of these indicators is that they can be readily observed by non-specialists, are relevant in any context, and lend themselves to inter- and intra-country comparisons.

Equivalent indicators do not exist for the field of psycho-social development, which forms a major component of a child's make up. For older children, school failure and drop out rates are often used as indicators of psycho-social functioning. But these indicators are not fair to children as they usually tell more about the schools and the education system than about the children themselves. For younger children practical, easy-to measure and internationally comparable indicators are not available.

As long as commonly agreed upon psycho-social indicators are not in place, work at the community level should be guided by other forms of information or understanding about children. Although not sufficiently sturdy in a scientific sense, views of parents, teachers, and care-givers are highly relevant. Reports of this kind, ideally corroborated by observations by others, should be welcomed as they do give a picture of the effectiveness of the programme, and keep the attention trained on the child.

The availability of local partners are indispensable as they have the knowledge, skills, contacts and sensitivity to reach children.

Ideally, indicators should be used in tandem with a proper monitoring system. Only then can the effect of a programme or intervention be ascertained. This would entail the establishment of a system that, in its most rudimentary form, would keep track of the number of children and of what is happening to them in the areas of health, nutrition, and psycho-social development. As community averages can easily obscure or hide individual or sub-group differences, these numbers should take into account other pertinent features as well. These features could, for example, refer to socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, religious, or geographical backgrounds of the children and their families. RB could, in principle, set up such a monitor but this social platform for children would be far more strengthened if it were used and maintained by partners.

5.3 Strengthening the Role of Advocacy

The press and media is replete with incidents of children's involvement in crime, prostitution, child labour or about the corruption of childhood. These events in themselves provide enough food for reflection but there are other dimensions to the discussion as well. It is evident that police officers and other law enforcement agencies have either never heard of the CRC or did not know how to act in accordance with it. Local

What, in the end, should determine Redd Barna's mission? Should it not be the situation of the ten-year old boy who is chained to a loom in Kathmandu; the twelve-year old girl in a Bangkok brothel; the eight-year old in Phnom Penh who stepped on a mine and lost both feet; the baby in Colombo who is born with AIDS; the sexually-abused five-year old girl in Oslo?

NGO claim that there is little awareness in their countries about the rights of children, and, even worse, no real concern for the plight of children outside their immediate kith and kin. They see the gross violations of the CRC, such as child prostitution, child labour, and under-resourcing of services for children at risk, as directly related to this lack of awareness. They are also open to attack and association with an international agency may provide them with protection.

The majority of local NGOs realize that they should position themselves as children's advocates and make education of the public one of their top priorities. The Thai "Foundation for Better Life for Children", succeeds in placing a short feature article on children in a local newspaper almost every day; the "Child Wel fare Association of Thailand" has formulated a set of far-reaching recommendations for the development of child welfare laws; " Children Working in Nepal" (CWIN) organizes workshops and issues publication; "Lawyers for Human Rights", Sri Lanka, attracts publicity and exposes corruption by defending the cause of poor children in court.

Thailand: "More children are being killed after sexual abuse. Situation is getting worse, congress told."
Aphaluck Bhatiasevi, 6 November 1996, Bangkok Post

Sri Lanka: "Education without religion can only make clever devils."
31 January, Daily News

Nepal: "Foreign paedophiles on the prowl in Nepal."
Pradeep Silwal, The Kathmandu Post, 11 December 1996

Cambodia: "Statistics of Shame: Children in Conflict.There are more mines than children: two for every child."
Child Survival-World Development Newsletter, May-June, 1995

Thailand: "Suicide cases on the rise in poor nations. Asia thought to be especially vulnerable."
Aphaluck Bhatiasevi, 7 November 1996, Bangkok Post

So far, however, the efforts of these agencies have been piece-meal or mainly restricted to fundraising for their own activities. While scarcity of resources is an impeding factor, NGOs also concede that they are unfamiliar with advocacy work, that they do not have detailed information about children, nor good documents, and that they need outlets. On the more positive side, it should be noted that their close contact with children and their families forms a good foundation for effective advocacy.

> "Last week, Jun Boonkhuntod [a member of the Forum of the Poor] was shot dead ... Like other poor people, Mr Jun was submissive to government authorities ... One day, he realised he had rights as a member of society, so he decided to stand up for himself and for others."
>
> *Supara Janchitfah, Bangkok Post, 4 August, 1996*

RBs partnerships in the field should not become an end in themselves but should be used as a means for achieving the organization's larger goals, i.e., "to create a better life and a better future for vulnerable children". One way of doing this would be join forces with partners in advocating for this goal. It would be appropriate for RB to play a facilitating role in this context by acting as a sounding board and a resource to its NGO partners. RB has traditionally been in the vanguard of the children's rights movement and the promotion of the CRC is a major plank of its international agenda. RB has experience with engaging NGOs and governments in children's issues in various cultural settings. It has produced useful documentation and is capable of adding and updating this material. In addition, local agencies accept RB as a resource and as a serious partner in working out their own advocacy plans. This is an important starting point that RB can build on.

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6 THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF PARTNERSHIP

Given the geographical scope of RB's work, its partnerships for children are by definition developed in an intercultural setting. Does culture influence partnership? Is there a distinct Asian approach to partnership and does it differ from one country to the next? These are legitimate questions. The importance of the cultural dimension is increasingly recognized by international development agencies as well as by the business community. Culture is mentioned as a major factor is explaining the East-Asian economic miracle.

Throughout Asia, there is also a growing awareness and reassertion of cultural identity. There is a new confidence, typified in the sentiments expressed by Mahathir, the Prime Minister of Malaysia:

> "European values are European values, but Asian values are universal values".

Discussions in the Asian region on the complex subject of culture revealed a wide variety of views. In the main, people found it difficult to define Asian culture. A staff member of RB-Nepal summed it up when he said: " there is no Asian perspective, rather situational specifics". The majority felt more comfortable with spelling out the features of their own national cultures:

"... society is based on the concepts of destiny, caste system and patron-client relationships. There is a clash between Western values and local culture, between democratic values and traditional culture." (Staff, RB-Nepal, 1996)

"In Norway, adults may touch a child on the head as a sign of affection. In Thailand this would be considered as extremely offensive." (Staff, RB-Thailand, 1996)

However, cultural differences need not prove to be a barrier and could even have positive outcomes for the nature of the partnership:

"Culture affects the partnership and the partners affect the [organizational] culture. There is a struggle within Nepali organizations, a clash of values, but the organizations emerge stronger from these clashes." (Staff, RB-Nepal, 1996)

Some argued that the essence of partnership would not vary from one culture to the next, what would vary would be ways of communicating and operating. It can be concluded that understanding the complex field of cultural diversity and learning intercultural communication skills are seen as essential skills in developing fruitful partnerships.

"The culture of communication will affect the nature of the partnership. How you approach and speak to people is important. You have to learn a code of conduct to do business. For Japan, Europeans learn a code of conduct because money is involved. In Cambodia they come to help so no need to learn." (Staff, RB-Cambodia)

This inevitably leads to two related questions: how can people recognize cultural differences? How can they cope with them in the context of development partnerships?

6.1 Learning Intercultural Communication[12]

"It is because we are all different that we have so much to exchange with each other."
Trompenaars, 1996

12 This section draws on the work of Hofstede (1994) and Trompenaars (1996).

Down to the remotest village, people can be situated differently along the countless dimensions that make up culture.[13] They may diverge in their appreciation of assertiveness versus modesty, of prestige versus skills, of collectivism versus individualism, or fate versus free will. There are several layers of culture and people can belong to different ones at the same. These are:

- the national level (determined by the country a person belongs to);
- the regional/linguistic/ethnic/religious level;
- the gender level;
- the generational level;
- the organizational/corporate level.

National cultures, defined broadly as collective ways of reacting, will vary as will the corporate cultures of various organizations operating within one country.[14] They may not always be in harmony with each other. For example, there may be a conflict between the religious values of the society and the corporate culture of the organization to which an individual belongs; or between modern gender values and traditional generational culture.

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13 In most Western languages culture refers to "civilization" or "intellectual development" and the products of such development such as education, art, and literature. This is considered to be a narrow definition of culture and social anthropologists would extend it to include group patterns of thinking, feeling or acting. Culture, in this broader use of the word, could also be defined as the way in which a group of people solves problems.

14 According to Hofstede (1994), a considerable part of the failure of development assistance projects could be ascribed to the inability to recognize differences between the organizational culture of the donor and the recipient country.

Is it possible to relate to this cultural diversity in a manner that is conducive to building effective development partnerships?[15] The first step is that both parties should recognize and accept that they bring in their own cultural values. Donor countries are, by definition, richer and also culturally more individualist. Conversely, recipient countries are poorer and more collectivist. This is but one aspect of difference, there could be gaps at other levels as well.

Intercultural communication can be learnt. It requires an awareness and knowledge of one's own as well as the other's culture and skills in putting this information into practice. It also calls for "perspective taking", i.e., the wish, attitude and ability to look at a situation with the eyes of the other. These qualities are needed in international donor as well as in local agencies. It could be argued, however, that as initiators donors carry additional responsibilities. Failing the willingness to carry these, cross-cultural partnerships will not be feasible.

Perspective taking and other intercultural communication skills will provide glimpses of the "cultural and social capital"[16] owned by the other partner. These are the special ways of greeting, the relationship with house spirits, the songs, the street games, the preferred tastes in food, family relations, the texture of a dress, the manner food is been prepared, the corner shop, and all those things that make people unique and different from each other. Access to such information is indispensable in understand

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15 Improving the quality of intercultural communications in the development field is an understudied area which deserves far more attention than it has received so far.

16 These terms have been introduced by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Now they are often used to describe the things that make up the daily lives of people.

ing how children grow up, how families function and how communities work. To have access to this kind of knowledge, international donors cannot do without local partners.

It is also important to recognize that intercultural development partnerships have an institutional as well as an interpersonal side. Difficulties in interper sonal interactions should not be used as an excuse for deficiencies in institu tional structures relating to staff quality, training and organizational structures. The partnership will be productive only when there is a flow of externally validated know-how and values to the local agency and locally validated know-how and values to the donor.

Partnership is not a given entity, nor has it a momentum of its own. Partner ships have to be forged and can assume their unique character only by going through this process. The form, content and style of RB's partnerships in Asia cannot be predicted or prescribed. At best they can be described as they evolve.

The strongest "Asian" feature may turn out to have less to do with partnerships, but rather with the similarity of the backdrop against which they are played out. This backdrop is globalization and is already displaying its rawest dynamics in this region. Its promises of prosperity, education, work, a more equitable society and a better environment are countered by fears of a rise in inequality, dwindling jobs and wages, "casino economics", environmental plunder and weak democracies.[17] RB cannot fully control the partnerships that will emanate from this scenario but it can help to set the frame. It has powerful tools to bring to the table. These are, once again:

- financial resources;

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17 See, for example, John Cavanagh (1997).

- internationally-validated know-how and values, in particular, the rights of the child;
- recognition of cultural diversity;
- access to networks; and
- a good reputation.

To sum up, RB's partnerships in Asia will be judged on the effectiveness with which they can use these tools in the interests of children.

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Redd Barna
P. O. Box 7475
VIENTIANE
Lao PDR

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